

Testimony

H.B. 5559 An Act Concerning A Uniform School Calendar

Submitted by: Doreen Marvin

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March 17, 2014

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleishman, and members of the Education Committee

My name is Doreen Marvin and I serve as the Director of Development of LEARN, the regional educational service center in southeastern Connecticut. I also had the distinct pleasure to serve as the co-chair of the Regional Calendar Task Force along with your esteemed colleague, Representative Mike Demicco. This testimony is in support of Raised Bill 5559, An Act Concerning a Uniform School Calendar, as well as the complete recommendations of the Uniform Regional School Calendar Task Force. You have written testimony from Dr. Eileen Howley (Executive Director), on behalf of LEARN that speaks to LEARN's support of the HB 5559 and the history of a successful regional calendar in the LEARN region. I will speak to my support of HB 5559 as the co-chair of the Task Force.

The Task Force representatives included members of the legislature, State Board of Education, Connecticut Federation of Teachers, Connecticut Education Association, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the Connecticut Regional Education Service Centers, the Connecticut Federation of Catholic School Parents, a school principal, the president of the Connecticut Parent Teacher Association and a representative from First Student Transportation. The Task Force listened to presentations from the MORE committee, two regions that currently have successful regional calendars, from the Hartford regional student transportation system, and from our CT Secretary of State regarding her support for schools to be student free during elections. The Task Force also heard from a CT citizen supporting student free days during voting for safety reasons. The work of the Task Force was extensive and collaborative. Their recommendations were thoughtful, encompassing, and inclusive.

HB 5559 supports the Task Force recommendation of delaying the mandated year of implementation to allow school districts more time to modify binding contractual language and avoid unnecessary impact bargaining costs. Based on the lessons learned from the regions currently using regional calendars, I urge the committee to support the delay in the mandated compliance and to consider all of the Task Force recommendations. These recommendations include allowing for a one year implementation delay waiver for districts that are unable to rectify contractual issues prior to the 2016- 2017 school year. Additional recommendations include individual district flexibility of up to 5 days, and direction to the Commissioner of Education to assure that the Vocational-Technical system and other public schools of choice are part of the regional calendar planning. The Task Force also developed guidelines for the Regional Education Service Centers to use within their respective regions to create a regional calendar that assures a minimum of 180 student school days, 2 common professional development days (one of

which will be Election Tuesday in November), a common start date and 3 vacation periods (one of which must fall during the summer). These guidelines support the legislative charge for the Task Force. I urge you to support these guidelines as well.

The Task Force recognized the potential benefits, potential challenges, and potential opportunities. These benefits include shared services, personnel and professional development as well as coordinated transportation contracts, for example. However, there are many unique characteristics in particular communities, such as time honored holidays, customs and traditions, as well as variances in local contracts. The Task Force considered the variations across communities and therefore, made recommendations that both support achieving regional efficiencies while still allowing for some variance based on contractual and local needs. Specifically, in addition to delaying mandated adoption of the calendar, the Task Force recommends the addition of up to five days within a regional calendar for cultural and religious observances, based on community needs, and unanticipated circumstances such as inclement weather, construction delays, serious maintenance issues, and student assessment windows. Requiring that the state vocational-technical system schools and other public schools of choice adhere to the regional calendars would be essential to help achieve regional efficiencies.

The Task Force also recommends that the Legislature review the impact on transportation- patterns and contracts that may be impacted by the regional calendar implementation. You may want to consider updating the RESC Alliance Feasibility Study from 2011 to assist in this review.

In the regions that presented about their regional calendar, it was evident that the regional start dates, regional days for professional development, and generally similar vacation periods have all promoted shared learning, shared transportation costs and shared efficiencies, while still maintaining local control of the final calendars and supporting local communities.

Thank you for your time and attention.